

DECD Report to the Governor's Steering Committee on Natural Resource-based Industries September 30, 2004

In its efforts to implement the recommendations coming out of last November's Blaine House Conference on Natural Resource-based Industries, DECD has been focusing in three key areas for which it was given the primary responsibility.

I. Curriculum Development

Top priority has been given to the recommendation that DECD "convene a development committee to develop degree, research, and extension programs in Hospitality and Recreation."

Meetings have been held with officials from the state university and community college systems, as well as with tourism industry representatives. The purpose of these meetings has been to review programs currently in place, as well as to consider proposals from the academic community for a considerable expansion of its research and curricular activities in the fields of recreation, hospitality, and tourism business management.

Proposed deliverables from the University of Maine include:

1. New offerings to enhance higher education opportunities in tourism-related programs.
2. New Web site that allows Maine's tourism businesses to access existing tourism business resources from Maine, the northeast and nationally for business planning and marketing.
3. Additional analyses of Longwoods' data
4. Establishment of a Center for Tourism Research and Outreach (CenTRO)
5. Establishment of Maine TAC (Maine Tourism Advisory Committee)
6. Comprehensive inventory of Maine's tourism-related businesses, including an examination of differences across tourism regions.
7. Other proposals contingent upon greater funding.

II. Branding

The second area of focus has been on the recommendation that DECD "explore a comprehensive branding campaign" which would serve to promote all of Maine's natural resource-based industries. DECD has been meeting with individual agencies to develop a better understanding of the branding and marketing efforts currently underway. Agencies and organizations involved include: Departments of Conservation, Inland, Fisheries and Wildlife, Agriculture, Transportation, Office of Tourism; other groups include the Maine Arts Commission and the Maine Lobster Promotion.

DECD has also met with these agencies as a group to consider ways for better collaboration between the agencies in an effort to gain maximum benefit for all of Maine's natural resource-based industries.

III. Tourism Technical Assistance/Business Development

As part of its effort to develop strategies for more comprehensive planning and technical support for tourism businesses throughout the state, DECD has been looking to the recently announced Fermata, Inc. pilot projects for a clearer look at regional infrastructural needs.

Under the terms of the contract, FERMATA will apply its approach for establishing nature tourism as a local economic development tool in three demonstration regions:

- An area including Greenville, Millinocket and southern Piscataquis County
- Western Mountains
- Calais-Down East

The zone of influence and planning boundaries for each of these three regions will be determined as one of the first steps during the planning process.

Work in each of the three demonstration regions will include the following tasks and activities:

Task one - inventory and assessment

- FERMATA will conduct a detailed inventory and assessment of the natural resource-based tourism offerings in the three regions. We understand that much of this information has been gathered in the Western Mountains region and will be made available to us for this project.
- Assess cultural and historical offerings that are connected to natural resources (such as a wood working studio that uses locally harvested timber as a raw material or an old farming settlement which was developed near a river's edge because of the fertile soils found there) that, when grouped with the nature-based thematic itineraries, enrich visitor experiences by framing the human experience within the natural world.
- Currently, we understand that these offerings are a disconnected collection of sites. We propose to bring them together to form the basis of a logical marketing platform that can be positioned with appropriate markets.

Task Two – Tourism product gap analysis and development recommendations

- FERMATA will analyze “gaps” in tourism product offerings in the three regions.
- Assess the feasibility of creating additional products that reflect the regional identity and community appropriateness.

- Develop recommendations for how these products and related interpretive programming can be developed and utilized to move key markets to these venues and to communicate messages that project partners seek to advance.

Task Three - Identify needs and make recommendations for enhancements in the travel and tourism infrastructure

- FERMATA will work with local economic development and tourism promotion agencies to inventory lodging, dining, outfitting, and guiding services in the three regions
- Identify needs and make recommendations for new travel and tourism infrastructure products and services.
- Develop and offer a training program for site managers, service providers, and others on key interpretive messages and how to serve the needs of nature tourists.

Following is the timeline agreed upon:

Timeline

Task	Completion date
<i>Task one - inventory and assessment</i>	
Project start up meeting in Augusta	Aug. 31, 2004
Meetings in the project regions and Augusta with project partners and stakeholders to explain project, gain support and seek input	Oct. 31, 2004
Detailed inventory and assessment of natural resource-based tourism offerings	Dec. 31, 2004
Assess cultural and historical offerings that are connected to natural resources	Dec. 31, 2004
Create marketing platform including interpretive messages	Feb. 28, 2005
Meetings in the project regions and Augusta with project partners and stakeholders to present progress and review emerging recommendations	Jan. 31, 2005 March 31, 2005
<i>Task Two – Tourism product gap analysis and development recommendations</i>	
Analyze “gaps” in tourism product offerings	March 31, 2005
Assess the feasibility of creating additional products	June 30, 2005
Communications and marketing recommendations	June 30, 2005
<i>Task Three - Identify needs and make recommendations for infrastructure enhancements</i>	
Inventory lodging, dining, outfitting, and guiding services	March 31, 2005
Recommend new travel and tourism infrastructure products and services	June 30, 2005
Develop and offer a training program	June 30, 2005
Meetings with project partners and stakeholders to present final recommendations	June 30, 2005